



THE MAJESTIC BALD EAGLE

by Lanny and Marilyn Johnson

As the Jones family hiked around a lake, young Billy excitedly cried out, "Wow! Look at that humongous bird way up there!"

"Is it a vulture?" his sister Mary asked.

Mr. Jones watched for a while and answered, "It is hard to tell from this distance, but it's probably an eagle and not a vulture. When a vulture soars, its wings are uplifted like a 'V', whereas a soaring eagle stretches its wings out flat. Since there are only two kinds of eagles in North America, it's probably a bald eagle or a golden eagle. I have heard that there is a nesting pair of bald eagles in this area, so I'm guessing it's one of them."^{1,2}

Suddenly, Billy yelled, "It's falling out of the sky!"

As they watched, the bird plummeted in a steep, high-speed dive towards the lake. Just above the water, it pulled up and, with its feet and powerful talons, it snatched a fish and flew off.

"Well, that answered our question as to what kind of eagle it is. That's a bald eagle."

"But it wasn't bald, Dad."

"You are right, Billy. Did you see the white head and tail? The name bald eagle comes from the old English word, 'balde', meaning white."³

"That was absolutely amazing," Mary exclaimed. "Mom, did you see how fast it dropped! And how on earth did it see that fish from so high up?"

Mrs. Jones responded, "I recently read that a bald eagle can fly at 45 miles (72 km) an hour and dive at 100 miles (161 km) an hour! Using their powerful wings, with spans up to 8 feet (2.3 m), they can

rise on warm air currents to 10,000 feet (3048 m) and then leisurely soar for hours."^{4,5,6}

"With their great eyesight, which is 6 to 8 times more powerful than humans, the bald eagle can soar at this altitude and spot fish - even a mile away."⁷

"I didn't know they ate fish," Mary said.

"They belong to a group of birds called 'sea eagles', which catch fish out of rivers, lakes, or seas," Mrs. Jones answered. "That is why bald eagles usually live near sources of water. If fish are scarce, they will hunt rabbits, muskrats, ducks, snakes, turtles, and crabs. They will also eat dead animals, and even steal meals from other birds."^{8,9,10}

"There is an observation shelter ahead where we can look at an eagle's nest.

Billy, if there are any eagles there, we need to be quiet, so we don't scare them away," Mr. Jones instructed.

As they entered the shelter, Mrs. Jones whispered, "Look kids! There are four birds in the nest. Two have white heads and the others are brown. This sign says that white heads



indicate these are mature bald eagles at least 4 or 5 years old. When baby eaglets hatch, they are covered with light gray feathers, but around 3 weeks old, they turn to a brown color."¹¹

"So, the two with the white heads are the

parent eagles and the brown ones are kids!" Mary reasoned.

Mrs. Jones continued, "It also says the mother eagle will lay up to 3 eggs a year. However, only one usually survives to leave the nest in 10 to 11 weeks. Both parents take turns incubating the eggs. As one sits on the eggs, the other hunts for food. In about a month the eggs hatch."^{12,13}

"An eagle's nest is called an aerie (AIR-ee). It is made of sticks, twigs, and grass, up in trees 20 to 30 feet (6.1-9.15 m) above the ground. Bald eagles build some of the largest bird nests. They are about 2 to 4 feet (.61-1.2 m) deep and 4 to 5 (1.2-1.5 m) feet wide. The biggest bald eagle nest on record was 20 feet (6.1 m) deep and 9.5 feet (2.9 m) wide,

weighing over 2 tons (1814.4 kg)!"^{14,15}

"You know kids," Mr. Jones said, "it must take a lot of energy to fly as high as the bald eagles can but God has given bald eagles extraordinary abilities. By using their powerful, well-designed wings and warm, rising air currents, they can then soar and rest, renewing



3 immature Bald Eagles in nest
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